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## Ten Years of Childhood in the Past

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## **Editorial – Ten Years of *Childhood in the Past***

Eileen M. Murphy

I am truly delighted to welcome you to the tenth volume of *Childhood in the Past*; the fact the journal has made it to this age is a clear testament of the level of academic interest in learning more about the children who undoubtedly played a hugely important role in the lives of their communities and families in the past (Fig. 1). Just as is the case today, these youngsters would have been associated with some of the most intense emotional experiences of those with whom they closely interacted. Anguish would have been felt when they became ill, suffered accidents and ultimately died but undoubtedly their achievements, as they developed, and even just their happy smiles and playful ways would have brought joy and pleasure to all those around them. At a societal level the experiences of past children throughout the life course can provide us, as investigators from the future, with rich insights; the contribution that the study of past children and childhood can make to enable a more holistic understanding of past cultures should not be underestimated. The bodily remains of these children can serve as a barometer of health status and provide measures of the impact of particular environments, not to mention periods of extreme pressure such as warfare, famine or just poverty, on the levels of stress experienced by a population. We can gain insights concerning the contribution they made to basic subsistence strategies through the evidence left behind in relation to items associated with learning and play. The manner in which their bodies are treated in death, and their association with ritual objects and spaces, can provide a window into the spiritual beliefs of a society. Understanding of the very structure and functionality of a society, and of the processes of socialisation, can be gleaned through evidence that demonstrates the evolving place of children in relation to their age and sex, for example, as they traverse the life course. Evidence of child-centred activities can also be found through studies of breastfeeding or the evidence of purposefully made toys, amongst others. Child rearing in its own right would have been a critical aspect of past life – absolutely crucial to ensure the survival and future of any society – but sadly this basic premise of life is often completely forgotten about and ignored in studies of the past.

*Childhood in the Past* has grown and developed itself since it commenced in 2008 when it was first published by Oxbow Books, who then sold its rights to specialist journal publisher, Maney Publishing, in 2013. This change was also associated with a move to the production of two issues per year. In 2015 the journal was acquired by the Taylor and Francis Group as part of their acquisition of Maney Publishing. Each volume has commenced with an invited paper and these have been written on a wide variety of topics by anthropologists, archaeologists, artists and historians in keeping with the interdisciplinary spirit of the journal. Three special issues have been published on ancient Mayan childhood (vol. 4, part 2), play, toys and memory (vol. 7.2) and 'The Child is now 25', a celebration of the work that has been undertaken since Grete Lillehammer's (1989) seminar paper 'A Child is Born' (vol. 8.2). The past nine volumes have seen the publication of some fifty-nine book reviews and forty-nine research papers. In an attempt to assess the developments and techniques that have been used by the contributors to *Childhood in the Past* I undertook a bibliometrical study of the research papers which examines the characteristics of both the authors and the papers they have produced.

A total of fifty-four authors have contributed papers to *Childhood in the Past*; 72.2% (39/54) of whom have been female and 27.8% (15/54) male. If we accept that the journal represents one of the main forums for publication of papers in this area it is clear that studies of childhood in the past are dominated by female scholars. When the geographic location of the institutions from which the contributors derive is examined it is evident the authors have originated from some fourteen countries (Fig. 2). A notable predominance of researchers are based in UK institutions (51.9%), but this is not entirely surprising given that the journal is a UK-based publication. It is heartening to see that the contributors span four continents (using the seven continent model) – Australia, Europe, North America and South America – and perhaps a future aim can be to attract papers from Africa and Asia. It was possible to identify the disciplinary background of each author from an examination of their addresses and the nature of the content of their papers. This has indicated representation of five disciplines – anthropology, archaeology, classics, education and history – within the volumes to date (Fig. 3). It is evident that

papers submitted by archaeologists (75.9%) have dominated the journal, with historical (14.8%) submissions having occurred with next greatest frequency. A further goal of the journal as it moves into its second decade could be an attempt to further increase the disciplines represented within the volume in keeping with the original aim of the journal to transcend disciplinary boundaries.

Turning to the forty-nine papers, a variety of forms of evidence have been used to gain insights into past children and childhoods in many of the articles but it was invariably possible to identify the dominant medium used in each paper – buildings, burials, images, living people, material culture, settlements, skeletal remains and written sources (Fig. 4). The predominant sources used comprise burials (26.5%), material culture (22.4%), written sources (20.4%) and skeletal remains (14.3%). Another challenge for the future could be to search harder for evidence of children in relation to, for example, the daily use of settlements and buildings. If we can achieve our aim of attracting further interest by scholars in disciplines, such as anthropology, psychology and sociology, for example, the data derived from living people might also increase.

In her contribution to this volume Margarita Sánchez Romero has explored the historiography of research undertaken into past childhood through a consideration of the subjects dealt within the past issues of *Childhood in the Past*. She provides a narrative that focuses primarily on landscapes of childhood which she explores through bodies, places and material culture. In an effort to gauge the topics that have been addressed by contributors I have attempted to summarise the main topics addressed in the various contributions; this amounts to some twelve broad themes – health, the impact of war, infant feeding, learning, the life course, memory, migration, play, religion and ritual, social identity, taphonomy and theoretical considerations (Fig. 5). A majority of the papers have dealt with issues related to social identity (22.5%), with studies of the life course (12.2%) and religion and ritual (12.2%) also well represented. Following on from my comments above, which note how the study of children and childhood is integral to the understanding of the basic functioning of past societies, it is interesting that the

majority of papers have dealt with issues not specifically related to child-centred activities; children clearly had agency within the societies in which they lived.

It was possible to assess the historical territory in which the research was focused for thirty-five of the papers; in the remaining fourteen papers the work spanned two or more adjacent or sometimes distant countries (Fig. 6). Some ten territories<sup>1</sup> – Argentina, Australia, Britain, Finland, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Spain, Sweden and the USA – were represented. The majority of studies were focused on Britain (40%), which is again perhaps reflective of the fact that the journal is a UK-based publication, but there is good representation of a number of other areas, in particular Greece (14.2%), the USA (14.2%) and Ireland (11.4%). Hopefully the geographic spread of studies will continue to further increase over the forthcoming years.

To investigate the chronological span of the papers, those dealing with the pre-Columbian Americas and multi-period studies were excluded leaving a total of forty-two that could be assigned to one of seven broad periods – Mesolithic and Neolithic (8500-3200 BC), Bronze Age (3100-1065 BC), Roman (100 BC-AD 550), Early Medieval (AD 500-1300), Later Medieval (AD 1300-1600), Early Modern (AD 1650-1900) and Modern (AD 1850-2000) (Fig. 7). Studies of Early Modern (26.2%) and Modern (21.4%) date predominate, but it is pleasing to see that earlier periods are also well represented. Indeed, it should not be forgotten that Palaeolithic studies were also included in Special Issue Volume 8.2 of the journal. As such, in broad terms, the entire span of modern human activity has been represented within the issues of the journal published to date.

This bibliometrical analysis has revealed some interested insights in relation to both the backgrounds of the contributors of the papers as well as the nature of the research that has been undertaken on past childhood over the past decade. The data can also be used to help us strategically direct the workings of SSCIP and, by extension, *Childhood in the Past* in future years. It is clear that male academics need to be encouraged to further engage with this topic. We also need to develop our influence into Africa and Asia as well as encourage scholars from a broader range of subject areas, including psychology,

sociology and medicine, to engage with childhood in the past and contribute to the journal. Regarding the nature of the studies to have been published to date, the impact of children on the physical environment is an area that could be further investigated, and efforts need to continue to be made to ensure that past children from all around the world, across all time periods, are represented in our narratives of the past. The study of children and childhood in the past has gained critical mass over the past decade. The survival of the journal to its tenth birthday is an indication that this field of study is here to stay and I, for one, am looking forward to seeing how the discipline develops over the course of the next decade.

### ***SSCIP in 2016***

2016 was another busy year for SSCIP from start to finish. It sponsored a session – ‘Seen but now Heard: The Osteoarchaeology of Non-adults’ – at a two-day conference held in Manila on the 8-9th January entitled ‘For the Love of Death: Human Osteoarchaeology in South-East Asia and the Pacific’. The conference was organised by Rebecca Crozier and colleagues of the Archaeological Studies Programme of the University of the Philippines. The Society also sponsored a highly successful one-day conference entitled ‘Little Lives: New Perspectives on Child Health and the Life Course in Bioarchaeology’ which took place on 30th January in the Department of Archaeology, Durham University, and was organised by Sophie Newman, Lauren Walther and Claire Hodson. The meeting aimed to showcase current research into child health in the past, and facilitate discussion relating to how we can use such approaches to gain a life course perspective within bioarchaeological study. The conference was attended by sixty delegates from a wide range of institutions based within Europe and North America and revealed many new avenues for consideration within this field of research. SSCIP members were also busy at the European Association of Archaeologists annual conference in Vilnius in early September where we organised two sessions. Grete Lillehammer and I organised a session entitled: ‘Giving New Meaning to Cultural Heritage: The Old and the Young in Past Societies’, while Povilas Blaževičius and Paulina Romanowicz ran a session on ‘Child’s Life – Between Play and Work’.

The Society's ninth international conference, organised by Rebecca Gowland and Ellen Kendall, was hosted by St Chad's College, Durham University, and ran from the 20-22nd September. The theme of the conference was 'The Family in Past Perspective: An Interdisciplinary Exploration of Familial Relationships through Time'. The organisers report that the meeting endeavoured to integrate interdisciplinary perspectives into an examination of family dynamics in past societies. It attracted a total of forty delegates from a range of Universities across the world (including Europe, North America and New Zealand) and disciplines represented included anthropology, archaeology, art history, bioarchaeology, history, psychology and sociology.

Four sessions were held over the three days and the conference opened with the session, 'Relative Needs: The Provision of Care and Resources within Families', which was introduced by the first keynote speaker, Helen Ball. Her stimulating talk addressed the interaction between culturally-derived parental belief, postnatal wellbeing, and infant sleep biology. The second day of the conference commenced with the second session, 'Between the Ideal and the Real: Image, Ideology, and the Past Family'. The keynote speaker for this session was Jane Humphries, who provided a fascinating discussion of the lives of women and girls during the Industrial Revolution, arguing for a need to recognise their experiences as distinct from male counterparts and their dominant parental role in the perspective of their offspring. Session three entitled 'Ties that Bind: Defining the Family', was introduced by keynote speaker Janice McLaughlin who spoke on the perception of 'bad blood' and the impacts of disability for the weakening or reaffirmation of kinship ties. The session was followed by the SSCIP AGM and the conference dinner was held in the evening and provided a welcome opportunity to continue discussions. The night concluded with a challenging quiz on families which ended in a (loosely defined!) three-way tie.

The fourth session took place on the final day and was entitled 'Separate Spheres? Para-Familial Engagement in the Wider World', and opened with a stimulating keynote talk by Mary Lewis. She explored the para-familial relationships formed by Medieval adolescent apprentices within the families they served, and also between apprentices themselves,

demonstrating the occurrence of a ‘youth culture’ of the time. This talk exemplified the successful integration of bioarchaeological and historical evidence for examining past life courses. The papers presented at the meeting provoked thoughtful and lively discussion throughout, and the organisers hope that the highly interdisciplinary nature of participants and papers will spur shifts in perspective and new collaborations and avenues of research in future. They conclude that a thoroughly enjoyable and stimulating time was had by all!

2017 will be another action-packed year for the Society and we are delighted to report that the tenth annual SSCIP conference is being organised by Hugo Pérez Trejo and Ximena Chávez Balderas and will take place in Mexico City on 6-8th November. The title of the conference is ‘The Life and Death of the Children in the Past’.

The Society’s monograph series, published by Oxbow Books, continues to flourish, and fifth volume in the series, *Children, Death and Burial: Archaeological Discourses*, edited by Melie Le Roy and I, is scheduled for publication in July 2017. Future volumes are also in the pipeline on the themes of childhood and play, ancient Greek and Roman childhood, Egyptian childhood and nineteenth-century childhoods. Proposals for future monographs should be submitted to Sally Crawford, the General Editor of the monograph series, and details for submission may be found on the Society’s website.

### ***Contents of Volume 10.1***

Volume 10.1 commences with an invited contribution by SSCIP President, Sally Crawford, in which she reviews the many and varied activities of the Society over the past ten years. She provides an important account of the events that led to the formation of the Society and indeed *Childhood in the Past*. She ends by reflecting on the achievements the Society had made over the past ten years and expresses a desire to continue supporting all those working in the field of past childhood studies.

The volume also includes four research papers, each of which have been led and developed by members of the SSCIP Committee. As mentioned above, the first paper by Margarita Sánchez Romero investigates the historiography of research undertaken into



past childhood through a review of the subjects dealt within the past issues of *Childhood in the Past*. Her approach uses bodies, places and material culture to examine a variety of landscapes of childhood – landscapes of care and affection, landscapes of learning, landscapes of socialisation, landscapes of uncertainty and, finally, landscapes of research in which she identifies potential future avenues of research. The second paper by Simon Mays, Rebecca Gowland, Siân Halcrow and I reviews key developments that have been made in the field of child bioarchaeology over the past ten years. The paper includes a bibliometric study of publications in physical anthropology/osteoaarchaeological journals over a ten-year period to assess the general trends that have occurred in relation to the study of the skeletal remains of children. It then proceeds to examine the social bioarchaeology of the child, in which a number of important theoretical frameworks used for positioning children in past societies, in particular the life course approach, are discussed. The bibliometrical study indicated that many of the publications with a focus on child bioarchaeology have concentrated on diet and palaeopathology and innovations in these areas are also explored. The paper concludes with the observation that bioarchaeological studies that integrate children and adults will contribute to a more complete view of past societies.

In their paper, Jane Eva Baxter and colleagues provide their personal reflections on interdisciplinarity in the study of childhood in the past. They start with the observation that a key characteristic of studies of childhood in the past is their interdisciplinary nature and suggest this situation has arisen for two main reasons; interest in the field is a relatively recent phenomenon and the study of past childhood has been largely marginalisation in traditional disciplinary approaches. They are of the view that spaces that allow scholars to come together to address past childhood as an area of study, such as those provided through SSCIP conferences or in the pages of *Childhood in the Past*, are essential. Four reflective essays are written by scholars from different backgrounds – theatre history (Shauna Vey), art history (Suzanne Conway), archaeology/teaching (Erin Halstad McGuire) and bioarchaeology (Deborah E. Blom). Each reflective essay considers the development and significance of interdisciplinary thinking in their work and also provides insights in relation to the discipline in which they practice.

David Lancy's paper provides a multidisciplinary survey of children as tool makers/users with the overall goal of deriving a set of generalisation that might characterise children as the makers/users of tools in early hominin societies. His information is derived from lithic archaeology, studies of juvenile chimps as novice tool users, recent laboratory work in human infant and child cognition in relation to the use of objects as tools and the ethnographic study of children learning about the tools used by their communities. He argues that this multidisciplinary approach has the potential to provide greater insights in relation to the development of children as tool makers and users than has previously been available to scholars working within narrow disciplinary constraints.

The journal ends with six book reviews compiled by Simon Mays. The first reviews Güner Coşkunsu's edited volume on interdisciplinary perspectives on the archaeology of childhood. Four of the other books are historical in nature and deal with a variety of diverse topics including, nineteenth-century British hymn books, childhood, youth and emotions, a history of parenting in America and adolescence in modern Irish history. Lynne McKerr's review on Charles Franklin Warner's book on *Home Decoration* was chosen for the special issue because, as she describes, it is one of a series of culturally significant 'Forgotten Books' which are out of copyright and have been subsequently digitised and made freely available. First published in 1911, it offers a fascinating insight into contemporary aspirations and ambitions for children living in early twentieth-century America.

Sincere thanks are due to all of the contributors and reviewers whose invaluable support, and unfailing belief that the youngest members of past societies should come out from the shadows, has enabled our journal to successfully reach its tenth birthday. We look forward with anticipation to the next decade.

## Notes

1. For the purposes of the current exercise Britain and Ireland have been divided according to their modern political geography. Northern Ireland has only been in

existence since 1922 and, since most of the studies included in the volumes pre-date this time, the study reflects the historic division of the two islands as separate entities.

## **References**

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